

CONFERENCE PLANS



IT BEGINS
WITH PRAYER

Purpose: This conference plan details a conference experience for all Sunday School and small-group leaders. The goal is to provide an overview of the book *It Begins with Prayer* and to apply its content to the Bible study setting of conference participants.

These plans are designed to encourage interaction with the contents on *It Begins With Prayer* and assumes conferees will have a copy of the book (print or digital) in the conference.

The plans can be used as one 3 hour session (with breaks) or as three 55-minute sessions (one 55-minute session for each chapter). If you choose three 55-minute sessions, you may lead the sessions over 3 consecutive weeks or use the plans during quarterly leadership meetings, with one session each for three consecutive months.

Options and adaptations are provided in the plans for leading a conference for leaders in a targeted age grouping.

General Preparation

- Secure copies of *It Begins with Prayer* by Dwayne McCrary, one for each participant (The book can be ordered at LifeWay.com/TrainingResources or you can download the free PDF version and print copies for everyone or send it to them so they can access the book on their electronic device. A free eBook is also available from the same location.)
- Read *It Begins with Prayer*, making notes as you do so. Record your response to the questions, identify concepts that may need additional study, and create a list of actions to take at the end of each chapter.
- Pray for yourself, for conferees, and for wisdom as you lead these conferences.
- Consider writing your teaching notes in your copy of *It Begins with Prayer*. Doing so will communicate to the conferees that you have interacted with the ideas presented in *IBWP*.
- Backgrounds are provided for the creation of digital presentations and church announcements about the conference(s). Clip art is also provided for use in publications. See LifeWay.com/TrainingResources to secure these helps.
- The plans assume the availability of a board and/or large sheets of paper.

Conference Segment 1a: Introduction

Preparation

- Arrange room so participants are seated in semi circle(s) facing a focal wall.
- Provide name tags for participants along with markers to write their name.
- Secure box of cake mix that requires only the adding of water.

Conference Plans

Arrival

1. Welcome conferees, inviting everyone to make a name tag and then share with others something they might add to a cake mix to give it that special touch.
2. After most have arrived, call attention to the just add water cake mix. Invite volunteers to share things a person might add to the mix to give it that special touch. Lead the group to discuss the difference between the phrases “just add water” and “add just water.” Ask: *Which of these phrases do you think best describes what the manufacturer of this cake mix meant? Why would that matter?*

Examine

3. Distribute copies of *It Begins with Prayer (IBWP)*, one for each conferee.

Option: Direct the group to download a copy of *It Begins with Prayer* on their electronic device by going to lifeway.com/trainingresources and clicking on the download PDF link for the book.

4. Call attention to the second paragraph on page 8 of *IBWP* (“When it comes to prayer and our Bible study groups, do we treat prayer...”). Review the paragraph with the group, summarizing the four points in bold. Emphasize the importance of prayer in Bible study groups.
5. Call attention to the fourth paragraph on page 6 of *IBWP* (“But one thing seems to be missing is a book...”), highlighting the questions included in the paragraph. Explain that the purpose of this conference is to help Bible study leaders of all ages begin to find answers to these questions.

Call attention to the Appendix (p. 46) for selected books on prayer that the group may want to study at a later time.

6. Lead the group in prayer, asking for God to direct the conversations and discoveries made during this conference time.

Conference Segment 1b: Reaching Begins with Prayer

Preparation

- Prepare a summary of “Lessons from Flake” (pp. 11, *IBWP*) and “A Means for Starting a New Group” (pp 19-20, *IBWP*).
- Secure 3x5 inch cards, enough for each participant.
- Record your response to the directive on page 14 of *IBWP* (“List the names of lost people for whom you are praying daily.”). Be prepared to share the first name or initials of a person you have listed.

Conference Plans

Introduction

1. On a board or large sheet of paper, write the following statement: Everyone needs to study the Bible because everyone has spiritual needs that only the Bible answers. Direct the group to discuss with another conferee their level of agreement with the statement. After allowing time, begin to ask what about the _____, using the people identified in the fourth paragraph on page 10 of *IBWP* (the skeptic, the parolee, etc).
2. Call attention to the last paragraph on page 10 of *IBWP* (“The enormity of...”), reading it aloud. Explain that the focus of this section of the conference will be on the role prayer plays in reaching people.

Examine

3. Summarize the “Lessons from Flake” section on page 11 of *IBWP*. Include the example of how Flake’s idea might be carried out.
4. Place the conferees into groups of three. Designate a third of the groups as Daily groups, a third as By Name groups, and the remaining third as For the Opportunity groups. Direct each group to find the information about their designation on pages 12 and 13 of *IBWP*, review that section, and identify roadblocks for why a person might not pray daily, by name, or for the opportunity.

After allowing time for the groups to discuss, invite volunteers to share the roadblocks they identified. Record the roadblocks on a board or large sheet of paper. Allow conferees to suggest ways of addressing the identified roadblocks.

If not suggested as a roadblock, indicate that one roadblock some face is knowing how to begin a conversation with someone about spiritual matters. Call attention to the list of “Questions to Initiate a Spiritual Conversation” on page 47 of *IBWP*. Direct the group to suggest additional questions a person might use to start a spiritual conversation.

Option: Direct each team to record their roadblocks on a card. Guide them to exchange cards with another group and then determine actions that might be taken to address the identified roadblocks listed by another group.

5. Emphasize that the question we are trying to answer is the role prayer plays in reaching people through our Bible study groups. Explain that how we answer this question may be very different depending on the age grouping we lead.
6. Direct the group to find other conferees who work with the same age group (preschool, kids, students, adults). Call for each group to review pages 14 through 19 of *IBWP* and begin to formulate a strategy for developing a culture of prayer-for-the-lost in their group in an age-appropriate way.

After allowing time for groups to work, reassemble the conferees and invite volunteers to share insights gained and potential actions they can take to foster a praying-for-the-lost culture in their group.

Potential debriefing questions:

- What role do we play as leaders in setting the culture for our groups?
- At what age should we begin to encourage people to maintain a prayer list of lost people?
- How does elevating our responsibility to pray for the lost impact how we disciple people?
- How can we teach so that we foster a culture of praying for the lost?
- What makes praying for the lost unique in your age group? How does it look different than it might look in a group for a different age? How can you leverage that uniqueness and difference in a positive way?

Adaptation: If leading a conference for leaders of one age grouping, place the conferees in groups, directing them to focus more on the ideas shared that relate to their age group; adult/student, kids, preschoolers.

7. Demonstrate how the use of the prayer list might help a church start new groups. Call on three people to stand with you. Give each of them two blank 3x5 inch cards. Direct them to write on one of the cards the name of another conferee still sitting. Direct them to then invite the person whose name they have written to stand as well by handing them the blank card (you do the same as well, eight people should now be standing including yourself). Create two groups of four, giving everyone standing an additional card. Direct each group to then record the name of a person on their card (if in the original standing group, they now have two names on their card) and then to invite that person to stand by handing them a blank card (sixteen people should now be standing). Create four groups of four, handing each person a second card. Point out that more people are waiting to be included and are counting on you to invite them.

Present a summary of the information on pages 19-20 of *IBWP* as a debriefing. Explain that writing the person's name on your card symbolized praying for that person. Emphasize that we are asking people to attend Bible study and these are people for whom we have prayed daily for weeks and maybe months leading up to the day we invite them. Explain that a compiled list of names serves as a tool for church leaders to see who needs to be reached so they can create new groups for that purpose.

Adaptations: For smaller groups, begin with only 2 people standing. For larger groups, expand the beginning number of those standing. You may also want to offer variants, only giving an additional card to some of the people standing to illustrate that not everyone will accept the challenge to pray for another person and invite them.

Next Steps

8. Direct conferees to page 14 in their copy of *IBWP*. Lead them to record their response to the directive in the middle of the page (“List the names of lost people for whom you are praying daily.”). Share with the conferees the first name or initials of one person for whom you are praying. Invite volunteers to share as well. Conclude in a time of directed prayer, calling on the conferees to pray silently for the names they have listed and then you voicing a prayer asking for opportunities for everyone present to share with the people named.
9. Challenge the conferees to take the principles discovered and to find ways of incorporating them into their group.

Conference Segment 2: Community Begins with Prayer

Specific Preparation

- Arrange room so participants are seated in sets of three facing a focal wall.
- Prepare summary of “What is Meaningful Community?” (pp. 23-24, *IBWP*).

Conference Plans

Introduction

1. As conferees arrive, invite them to sit in group of three and determine a characteristic or title that could be used to differentiate them from the other groups of three present. Encourage them to be creative with their group name to make sure their title is different from other group names.
2. After most have arrived, call for volunteers to share their defining characteristic or title as a group of three. Ask: *How does a shared characteristic create an identity for a group? How does that shared characteristic enhance community within that group?*
3. Explain that the goal of this conference segment is to help each Bible study leader discover how prayer fosters a sense of community.

Examine

4. Ask: *When you think of community, how do you define it?* Direct the group to share their responses in their groups of three. Invite volunteers to share one definition or idea from their group. Record response on a board. Highlight any connected or similar words or phrases.

Identify comments that emphasize a shared experience (not to be confused with sharing experiences) such as both attending the same event. Direct the group to review “The Problem with Group Gatherings” on pages 22-23 of *IBWP* and to discuss their reaction to the section in their groups of three.

Emphasize that the author of *IBWP* offers a description of community. Present a summary of “What is Meaningful Community?” on pages 23-24 of *IBWP*. Call attention to the question at the bottom of page 24 (What role does prayer play in your deepest relationships?). Guide conferees to record their response to the question. Lead the group to discuss the role prayer *should* play in our deepest relationships. Ask: *What keeps people from having those kinds of relationships?*

Challenge the conferees to seek to make prayer a more prominent part of their deepest relationships.

5. Ask: *How might prayer partners impact the sense of community found in the Bible study groups we lead?* (p. 26, *IBWP*) Help the group see the potential value of prayer partners encouraged through the Bible study groups. Emphasize that how that looks for students and adults will be very different from how that looks in kids groups.

6. Place conferees who work with students and adults on one side of the room and conferees who work with kids on the other side of the room. Direct the Student and Adult leaders to review “Decisions to Make” and “How Do We Start?” on pages 26-28 of *IBWP*, while the Kids leaders review “So What About Kids Leaders?” and “Should We Encourage Kids to Secure Prayer Partners?” Instruct both groups to create a set of principles to consider and actions to take when encouraging prayer partners within the age grouping of the group they lead. Direct them to their assigned sections in *IBWP* for insights. Explain that they can work in teams of two or more to create their list of principles and actions.

After allowing time for the conferees to work, invite volunteers who lead Preschoolers and Children groups to share their principles and actions. Record their responses on a sheet of paper labeled Kids. Star any principles that point to the leader having a prayer partner(s) as well.

Invite volunteers who lead Student and Adult groups to share their principles and actions. Record their responses on a large sheet of paper labeled Students and Adults.

Option: Create separate lists for Preschool, Kids, Students and Adults.

Adaptation: If conferees represent a single age grouping, designate half of the conferees as Student/Adult leaders and the other half as Kids leaders. Complete the step as written.

7. Lead the group to compare lists, looking for similarities and differences. Ask the Kids and Student leaders: *What can you do as a Kids or Student leader to help the adult leaders make this happen in their groups?* Ask the Adult leaders: *What can you do as an Adult leader to help the Kids and Student leaders make this happen in their groups?*

Next Steps

8. Lead conferees to review the potential actions they may need to take to build community through prayer in their groups. Challenge them to begin by securing weekly or monthly prayer partners for themselves if they do not yet have them. Direct them to record on page 30 of *IBWP* the names of people they might approach to be a prayer partner. Encourage them to also record one action they will take in the next month to foster praying relationships through their group.
9. Direct the group to spend a few moments in prayer with another conferee, sharing one prayer need with each other.

Option: Direct conferees to pray with a person that works with a different age grouping.

Conference Segment 3a: Serving Begins with Prayer

Specific Preparation

- Arrange room so participants are seated in semi circle(s) facing a focal wall.
- Large sheet of paper and marker
- Secure a knife, fork, and spoon.
- Review “Praying as a Means of Serving” (p. 33, *IBWP*).
- Create placards with the following statements: defines a disciple, spiritual discipline, instills boldness, and builds confidence and faith.
- Write on a large sheet of paper these four questions: How do we efficiently gather accurate prayer requests?; To whom should we communicate these requests?; How do we communicate the requests?; How can we encourage those making a specific request? (see pages 40-43, *IBWP*)

Conference Plans

Introduction

1. As conferees arrive, call attention to a sheet of paper and hand them a marker. Guide them to add an action to the sheet of paper they believe characterizes a great Sunday School or ongoing Bible study organization. If an action is already listed that they would have listed, allow them to place a check mark by that action. Direct them to hand the marker to another conferee.
2. After most have arrived, review the responses. Give special attention to the items that include a check mark. Introduce Arthur Flake, identifying him as a significant leader in the growth of Sunday School in the 1900s. Call attention to his “Fourfold test of a great Sunday School” included on page 31 of *IBWP*. Identify the actions included on the conferees’ list and those included on Flake’s list.
3. Highlight Flake’s fourth statement (“Enlisting, training, and utilizing the church members”). Explain that this conference will focus on the value of service and how prayer can be a vehicle for people to serve.

Examine

4. Call attention to the following phrases written on placards: defines a disciple, spiritual discipline, instills boldness, and builds confidence and faith. Explain that the author of *It Begins With Prayer* highlights these four reasons for focusing on service. (See pages 32-33). Invite conferees to suggest other reasons or values gained through serving. Help the group grasp the importance of helping others develop through service.

Call for a volunteer to select the placard that best identifies the value that most resonates with them. Allow them to share why they selected that placard. Call for a second volunteer to pick a placard that is different from the first one selected with them sharing why they selected that placard as well. Repeat until all four placards have been chosen.

5. Characterize prayer as being one way of serving others. Use information from “Praying as a Means of Serving” on page 33 of *IBWP* to support this statement.
6. Call attention to a knife, fork, and spoon. Invite conferees to declare the purpose of each utensil. (Note: Most will describe the purpose in utilitarian terms such as to cut an item, hold an item, and lift pieces of cereal). After allowing volunteers to share, propose the following if not suggested: these are tools for the sustaining of human life by providing humans a means to more effectively and efficiently eat the nutrients they need. Ask: *How does recasting the purpose of the knife, fork, and spoon in terms of sustaining human life impact how we might view these items?*

After allowing for discussion, explain that defining the purpose of an item or organization can change not only how we value that item or organization but can also impact the investment we are willing to make for that item or organization.

7. Direct the group to read “Rethinking Care Teams” on page 34 of *IBWP*. Create teams so that as many teams as possible have at least one person from each age-grouping represented. Explain that the teams are created so that Adult leaders can gain insights from Kids leaders and vice versa.

Direct the group to review pages 34-40 to identify the steps required to create a system for groups (adult, student, and kids) to providing opportunities for service. After allowing time for the groups to work, call for volunteers to share the steps they would recommend be taken for the creation of serving opportunities.

Remind the group that the goal is to provide opportunities for people to grow through service. Ask: *How can adult, student, and kids groups work together to provide opportunities for service?*

Adaptation: If Kids leaders only, challenge them to identify the steps required for them to secure a class parent. If student or adult leaders present only, recruit one person on each team and direct him or her to approach the assignment as if they are a Kids leader.

8. Comment that one element needing attention is the class prayer list. State: *Prayer with and for those in your Bible study group is an important element that makes a group great.* Invite volunteers to share how a class prayer list helps their class and them be more effective.

Call attention to the four questions you have written on a large sheet of paper: How do we efficiently gather accurate prayer requests?; To whom should we communicate these requests?; How do we communicate the requests?; How can we encourage those making a specific request? (see pages 40-43, *IBWP*). Explain that the author of *It Begins With Prayer* offers these four questions to help us improve our practices when it comes to our class prayer list.

Create four teams or areas of the room depending on the size of the group, assigning one question to each team or room section. Direct each team/section to review the section in *IBWP* for their assigned question and to identify one big takeaway from what they discover. After allowing the groups or

work, call on volunteers to share their big takeaway for their assigned question. Challenge the conferees to use these questions to help them improve their class prayer system.

Option: If different groups are assigned the same question, guide each group to share a different takeaway.

Next Steps

9. Remind the conferees of the opportunity they have of helping others grow spiritually through service. Lead them to record one action they will take to help create new opportunities for others to serve through their Bible study group.
10. Invite participants to pray that God will help them find ways to facilitate growth through service with prayer being a starting place.

Conference Segment 3b: Conclusion

Specific Preparation

- Prepare summary of Joshua 9.

Conference Plans

Introduction

1. Direct conferees to scan their copy of *It Begins With Prayer*, identifying insights gained and items that need more consideration. Highlight specifically the importance of praying daily by name for people who do not know Christ.

Examine

2. Present a summary of Joshua 9, calling specific attention to verse 14.
3. Note the three things identified in *IBWP* that were relied on by the Israelites to make their initial decision about the Gibeonites (the answers they heard, what they saw, and the judgment of others, p. 44, *IBWP*). Emphasize the limits of each of the things they relied upon.

Next Steps

4. Direct the group to read silently the last three paragraphs on page 44 of *IBWP*.
5. Guide the conferees to write a prayer for their Bible study group and for themselves as they lead that group. Lead them to silently pray, voicing what they have just recorded, with you concluding the prayer time.
6. Thank the conferees for their participation and encourage them to read all of *It Begins With Prayer* and discuss what they read with other leaders and class members.